



Health consumers back new focus on rising specialist costs

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Australia's peak body for health consumers has welcomed the federal government's focus on "out of control" specialist fees, saying reform is long overdue and must be delivered with consumers at the centre.

Health Minister Mark Butler has nominated growing specialist costs as the government's next major health reform focus as concerns grow about soaring fees being a major barrier to care.

"Consumers tell us constantly that specialist care is now something they budget for, and in far too many cases, go without. That is a system that is failing people," Consumers Health Forum of Australia Chief Executive Dr Elizabeth Deveny said.

Dr Deveny said affordability had deteriorated sharply in recent years, pushing specialist care beyond reach for many Australians.

"When inflation surges and household budgets tighten, health is an area where people cut back, and the consequences show up later and cost more," she said.

"Meaningful reform won't happen overnight, but the groundwork needs to start now. Investing in affordability early is always cheaper than managing avoidable deterioration down the track."

A CHF survey, released in February, found specialists were the single biggest cost worry when dealing with a new health issue, cited by 86% of respondents.

They topped the list ahead of mental health services (76%), dental (76%), allied health (64%), and diagnostic imaging (52%).

CHF is ready to work with the government on reform but warns solutions must be shaped with direct input from health consumers.

"We've been calling on the government to address specialist out-of-pocket costs for over ten years, so it is genuinely welcome to see this elevated as a national priority," Dr Deveny said.

"The people who actually live with these soaring costs every day must have a real say in what reform looks like."

CHF Consumers Health Forum of Australia

“It’s a great step for the government to acknowledge specialist costs are out of control and it’s heartening to hear that all options are on the table.”

“Now let’s work together on making specialist healthcare in Australia affordable for everyone.”

CHF has made specialist out-of-pocket costs, oral health affordability, and meaningful health consumer engagement key priorities for the 2026-27 federal budget.

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